

# Recent Progress and Future Challenges in Disability Student Services in Japan

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## Abstract

The Japanese government passed an anti-discrimination law, the Act on the Elimination of Disability Discrimination, in June 2013 (to be enforced April 2016) and ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in January 2014. Prior to ratification of the CRPD, the Japanese government had begun to construct an inclusive educational system in 2012. Before this systematic change, no legal obligation existed to provide support or accommodation for students with disabilities (SWDs). Only a limited number of Japanese institutions of higher education (IHE) have offered such accommodations, similar to those found in the United States and some EU countries, and the number of SWDs has also been at the low level (0.42% against all students in all IHEs in Japan). However, this systematic change has been spreading recognition of SWDs' needs among Japanese IHEs. In this article, we review the ongoing change in Japan in light of the legal background of disability student services, looking at changes in enrolment numbers of SWDs, examples of accommodations for SWDs in Japanese IHEs and other changes, and other preparations among IHEs for offering reasonable accommodation to SWDs.

*Keywords:* Disability student service, anti-discrimination law, inclusive educational system

On the socialization pathway that is commonly viewed as the norm in Japan, people proceed to higher education after graduating from elementary and secondary school and before launching into a career in the employment market. This idea has underpinned the mainstream of social participation in Japanese society. Therefore, the role of higher education is very important for mainstreaming students with disabilities (SWDs), as it is in other countries. Recently, the Japanese Government has been working on a social system to build an inclusive society without discrimination against people with disabilities and to offer reasonable accommodations to them. Thus, securing opportunities in higher education will become one of the main themes of societal efforts and obligation in Japan.

In this article, we review four points of change in higher education in Japan: the legal background of disability student services, enrolment of SWDs, examples of accommodations for SWDs among institutions of higher education (IHEs), and, in conclusion, other preparations that Japanese IHEs will need to do in the near future to offer reasonable accommodation to SWDs.

## The Legal Background

In 2007, the Japanese Government signed the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) that came from the United Nations in 2006 and then ratified the Convention in January 2014. This accomplishment came as the outcome of a long history of the Japanese disability movement, which was described by Hayashi and Okuhira (2001). Before reaching this decision, the Japanese government proceeded with preparations to ratify the Convention by revising existing laws and establishing new ones. For example, in August 2011, the Government amended the Basic Law for Persons with Disabilities. This amendment referred to the prohibition of disability discrimination and the provision of "reasonable accommodations" as a means to eliminate it, becoming the first law in Japan to require provision of reasonable accommodations. More directly, the Government passed the Act on the Elimination of Disability Discrimination (AEDD) in June 2013, which is considered a Japanese version of anti-discrimination laws for people with disabilities

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(Hasegawa, 2015; Mackie, Okano & Rawstron, 2014). The AEDD, which will take effect in April 2016, prohibits discrimination in all practices of both public and private entities, protecting people with disabilities regardless of what types of impairment they have or how severe their impairments are. The AEDD requires public entities, such as the national government, local government, public schools, or national and public universities, to provide reasonable accommodations in their activities. It also requires private entities, such as private business, restaurants, movie theatres, and private universities, to make an effort to do so.

Public transportation systems (trains, buses, airplanes, and the buildings and facilities associated with them) and a wide variety of facilities (parking facilities, special schools for students with disabilities, hospitals, markets, hotels, public offices, postal offices, banks, and public toilets) have to comply with the legal accessibility standards of the Barrier-free law (The Law for Improving Accessibility for the Elderly and Disabled) in 2006 which considers accessibility for wheelchair users and people with visual impairments when they are newly constructed or expanded on a large scale. However, the law itself does not oblige school facilities to comply with the standards. It is expected that the AEDD will expand the accessibility in all IHEs in Japan.

Given these transformations of policies, it is clear that the CRPD and AEDD have had a large impact on Japanese society. In the educational system for SWDs in particular, section 24 of the CRPD requires the contracting parties to ensure an “inclusive educational system.” The AEDD was established as a means to realize these policies, indicating that every educational institution will be obliged to avoid discriminating against students because of their impairments. Additionally, private institutions must make an effort to provide reasonable accommodations for SWDs and public institutions will be obliged to do so. An “inclusive educational system” will be the basis of the Japanese educational system, according to these legal requirements, whatever the educational level: elementary/secondary/postsecondary (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology [MEXT], 2012a). These systematic changes have also changed the purpose of special education, from providing a better education for SWDs to securing their human right to participate in general educational opportunities.

## Enrolment of SWDs in Higher Education

Currently, the enrolment rate of SWDs in Japan is limited. The Japan Student Services Organization ([JASSO], 2014a), which is the governmental organization to promote student services in universities, reported that the enrolment of SWDs in Japanese IHEs is 13,449 out of 3,213,518 (0.42% of all students, including undergraduate and graduate students). The U.S. Government Accountability Office ([GAO], 2009) reported that the enrolment rate of SWDs in the United States is 10.8% (2,076,000 out of 19,155,000 undergraduate students). The U.K. Higher Education Statistics Agency ([HESA], 2014) reported that the number of SWDs among the 740,000 first-year students enrolled in higher education in the United Kingdom in 2012 was 73,000 (9.8%). Considering that the SWDs rates in the United States and United Kingdom are about 10%, there still is a large gap in SWDs rates between Japan and the other two countries.

In the United States and in some European countries, these accommodations are usually coordinated by dedicated disability student services (DSS) offices. At this time, 8% of Japanese institutions (101 out of 1,910 institutions) have a dedicated DSS office and 79.2% of institutions (943 out of 1,910 institutions) have assigned the DSS to other offices as a part of their tasks (JASSO, 2014a). Regarding the need for dedicated DSS offices, which has not been well recognized in Japanese IHEs, MEXT (2012b) published a report called “Initial Report on Learning Support for Students with Disabilities.” The report mentioned several short-term goals for all IHEs, which include the importance of establishing a DSS office and information disclosure about the acceptance of SWDs in each institution. Services for SWDs are to be established in order to offer reasonable accommodations in all Japanese IHEs either before or after the enforcement of the JADL in April 2016.

The survey that JASSO conducted has been replicated every year since 2005 and has been given to all IHEs (1,190 institutions in 2014) in Japan. Figure 1 shows the annual changes in the rates of each disability compared to all SWDs from 2005 to 2014. Given that the “mental illness/disabilities” category was separated from the “others” category after 2012, “mental illness/disabilities,” “health disabilities,” and “autism spectrum disorder (ASD)” show the greatest increases among SWDs in this series of surveys. Compared with those three categories, the increase has been relatively small for the number of students in the “orthopedic disabilities,” “Deaf/hard of hearing (D/HH),” and “visual impairment” categories.

The increased enrolment of students with “invisible disabilities” may mean simply that social awareness of such disabilities, which has progressed across recent years, has helped in detecting the presence of these students through various student services (e.g., counseling and health services). In other words, this population might have already been on campus, and thus may not have actually increased.

Figure 2 compares the enrolment rates for each disability against all SWDs using the statistical data from JASSO (2014a), GAO (2009), and HESA (2014). The comparison with GAO and HESA data reveals that enrolment rates of students with “specific learning disability” and “attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)” are very low in Japan. This result may indicate that these disabilities are not well recognized in Japanese IHEs and that, consequently, there is less support for them. We should note that there was no “specific learning disability” in the 2014 HESA data; rather, this category was included in “specific learning difficulty,” along with dyslexia, dyspraxia, and ADHD. In addition, there was no ASD item in the GAO data.

MEXT (2012c) reported that 6.5% of students (an estimated 347,000) in general elementary and secondary education in Japan might have mild developmental disabilities, including learning disabilities (LDs), ADHD, or ASD. In general education in Japan, an inclusive educational system has been implemented recently to fulfill the requirements from CRPD. The establishing of continuous support from elementary through higher education among not only special schools but also mainstream schools looks hopeful for the future. The statistical number of students with LDs and ADHD is now low, but we may hope that their numbers in higher education will also rise in the future.

### **Examples of Accommodations for SWDs**

First, under the anti-discrimination law in Japan, in order to remove social barriers, educational institutions must offer reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities (a) who declare their need for such accommodation and (b) if the accommodation is not an undue burden for the institution. Because reasonable accommodations have to be considered on a case-by-case basis, it is essentially impossible to define a general answer to a query about what is reasonable. However, certain general supports have been provided to SWDs as concrete examples of what constitutes “reasonable accommodation.” The commonly provided accommodations from Japanese IHEs that already have a DSS office include the following list.

### **Human Support**

- Note taking
- Sign language interpreting
- Reader and/or scribe on tests
- Real-time captioning
- Assistants in laboratory procedures
- Personal assistant for moving around on campus, eating, and toileting (this support is likely to be controversial)

### **Accommodations Using Technology**

- Digital alternative formats of textbooks, instructional/research materials
- Braille display
- Braille printer/Braille printed materials
- Screen reader software
- Text-to-speech (TTS) software
- Speech recognition/voice input software
- Permission to use a word processor in class and on tests
- Permission to use a digital voice recorder in class
- Wireless hearing aids
- Assistive technology devices (e.g., switches, accessible keyboards)

### **Other Accommodations**

- Extra time in tests and examinations
- Alternative testing locations in quiet and distraction-free room
- Alternative oral/speech instruction as well as printed or written instruction
- Accessibility of the physical environment, such as buildings and classroom/lab settings

In Japan, it has been unclear who has the responsibility for providing personal services (such as personal assistance for commuting, moving around on campus, eating or toileting) to SWDs. The Services and Supports for Persons with Disabilities Act (2005) is the law that defines public personal services to be provided. However, personal services have not yet been defined in the Japanese legal system. Therefore, such services have hitherto been provided as an exceptional accommodation to SWDs, depending on the decision of each individual local government. There are some examples of IHE providing personal services independently when the local government does not provide services. In cases where such services are regarded as being insufficient, it was seen as an IHE problem rather than being based on the concept of “reasonable accommodation.” In the near future, further mature discussion is needed on what types of support should be provided under the legal schemes of the CRPD and AEDD.

### How Common Are Reasonable Accommodations Among All IHEs in Japan?

Up to this point, reasonable accommodation for SWDs has not been a legal obligation for Japanese IHEs. However, the range and variety of support for SWDs, which are available in institutions that have dedicated DSS offices, have been broadened over the years.

Several college guidebooks mention the above examples of accommodations for SWDs as common (e.g., The University of Tokyo, 2013; Nippon Fukushi University, 2012). Additionally, a guidebook issued by JASSO (2012) and titled *Disability Services Guide for Faculty and Staff* used case reports from campuses in Japan to illustrate various methods and ways of thinking for supporting students with diverse disabilities. The existence of such guidebooks indicates widespread accumulated know-how for supporting SWDs in Japanese IHEs.

JASSO has also made efforts to form a “Disability Student Support Network” to disseminate information related to DSS. As shown in Table 2, a total of 12 institutions serve as resource centers or corporative institutions for helping other institutions develop their support systems.

We must note, however, that this know-how has not been based either on the good practices already established in some universities or on concepts of the reasonable accommodations that should be offered in all institutions from the perspective of anti-discrimination. Whereas some institutions have good practices, discrimination and exclusion remain in other institutions in the Japanese higher educational context. The concept of reasonable accommodation, therefore, will require changes in the limited availability of accommodation, including ICT used for testing and in class. We need to focus on how the Japanese anti-discrimination law, which will be enforced in 2016, will affect the support system for SWDs in Japanese IHEs.

### Accommodations for Students with Developmental Disabilities

As noted above, a close examination of the services and accommodations provided by Japanese IHEs reveal that reasonable accommodations are not yet a common practice in Japanese IHEs. JASSO's (2014a) statistics show the percentage of institutions providing supports for students with developmental disabilities by support types based on the number of institutions that enrolled any of these students. The types of supports were divided into two categories: (a) services and accommodations linked directly to course work, which are closely related to the concept of reasonable

accommodations; and (b) support services that are not directly linked to course work. Most of the latter can be considered as optional personalized services, often provided as fee-based services for students with LD in the United States (Brinckerhoff, McGuire, & Shaw, 2001). Such services are provided not because they are required by law but because they help with students' personal growth. As shown in Table 2, it is clear that the percentage of IHEs providing students with non-coursework services is greater than that providing students with reasonable accommodations in Japanese IHEs.

This emphasis on the non-coursework type of support exists for several reasons. First, Japanese IHEs are not under any legal obligation, as mentioned earlier. Second, the student support service providers who have been helping students with disabilities are mainly psychiatrists and psychologists who work at student counseling or in university health centers (Suda, Takahashi, Kamimura, & Morimitsu, 2011). To illustrate this, whereas only 8.5% of the IHEs have a DSS office, about 90% of them have counselors. In addition, despite the high percentage of counselors (JASSO, 2014b), many of them, especially in small institutions, are part time, some of them working at the school only a day or two per week. It is not easy for such counselors to collaborate with faculty and staff members to make arrangements for course work accommodations. This situation may change soon because the Ministry of Education has encouraged IHEs to set up DDS offices and to create positions for staff members who are specialized in providing support services for SWDs (MEXT, 2012b). Therefore, the percentage of IHEs providing coursework-related accommodations is likely to increase under the changes in the law.

Third, the number of students with ASD is relatively large compared with those with LD and ADHD<sup>1</sup>. The students with ASD may have more needs regarding their campus life in general than for their course work. Group harmony is strongly emphasized in Japanese society, as most people know, and indirect communication through body language and gestures is also very common in Japanese culture. Such social and cultural norms make it more difficult for students with ASD to understand and adjust to the community in which they belong. Thus, counselors and psychiatrists on campus have chosen to provide counseling as well as direct instruction and training in their weak skills so that students with ASD can be successful on campus and in life after graduation.

### **Accommodations for Students Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing (D/HH)**

Although accommodation for SWDs is a current topic in Japan, a more traditional but on-going concern is accommodation for D/HH students. Student services for SWDs in Japan actually stem from support services for students who are D/HH. Obviously, even though there is not much data on the numbers, disabled students have been attending IHEs for many years, and the institutions have voluntarily attempted to support these students (Japan Association of National Universities, 2001). Individual professors or staff members, rather than the institution itself, often made these support efforts. One difficulty with support for D/HH students is that such services require a number of people who can work as interpreters, captioners, and note takers. Therefore, professors or staff members who wished to support D/HH students had to attract a number of students who were willing to be trained as note takers or captioners in the classrooms. Thus, universities had to launch some form of groups that could provide D/HH services, constituting the forerunners of DSS that many IHEs now have.

A major factor bolstering this trend was the establishment of the Postsecondary Education Programs Network of Japan (PEPNet-Japan). PEPNet-Japan is a collaborative network among pioneer universities based in the Tsukuba University of Technology, which is the only university for deaf people in Japan. It was established in 2004 and supported by PEPNet-Northeast (formerly NETAC, now transformed into PEPNet 2)<sup>2</sup>. As one of the major contributors to this field, PEPNet-Japan brought various IHEs into the field and educated their staff members to be pioneers leading the nation. They have accumulated the know-how to support D/HH students and have opened up a path towards the right goal by holding conferences and workshops, developing educational materials, and training staff members to organize DSS in their institutions. Now, approximately ten years later, their efforts have been recognized widely enough for them to receive more than 400 inquiries a year and to earn the “Prime Minister Award” in the “Barrier-free and Universal Design of the Year 2014” competition, which is held annually by the Japanese Government Cabinet Office.

Regardless of progress, Japanese IHEs still have problems in terms of D/HH services. First, the rate of diffusion of D/HH services remains at less than 50% (JASSO, 2014a). In the remaining 50% of the universities, D/HH students still struggle on their own. Moreover, most of the services currently provided in Japanese IHEs rely on volunteer note-takers recruited on campus. Because they are neither professionally

trained nor interpreters, these student note-takers tend to convey only 20-30% of the original message from the professors. They also find it hard to cover all of the high-level information in specialized academic fields. Thus, such services are limited to minimum access, and universities have a long way to go to ensure equal access in many areas.

### **How Should We Prepare for Accommodating SWDs?**

#### **Test Accommodations**

Test accommodations, including those for entrance examinations, are very important for mainstreaming or inclusion into regular education. Not only in the classroom setting but also in testing, rating, and grading for entrance/qualifying examinations, SWDs need reasonable accommodations to safeguard their learning rights and avoid discrimination from the mainstream. Administrators for entrance examinations in Japanese high schools and colleges have commonly made such accommodations as giving extra time on tests and providing Braille-translated or magnified copies of question sheets. However, educational institutions at every level have not generally recognized the need for a reader, a scribe, or text-to-speech technology for testing. It is especially difficult for students with low vision and dyslexia to take entrance examinations without accommodations, and the entrance examination is literally the entrance to mainstream education. After the Japanese anti-discrimination law takes effect, educational institutions will be required to recognize the importance of and begin to handle SWDs’ needs for reasonable accommodations in testing to be compliant with the law.

#### **Mediation System**

An essential result of the anti-discrimination system stems from its emphasis not merely on the *obligation* of educational institutions to offer reasonable accommodations but also on the *right* of people with disabilities to object to their lack of accommodations or discriminatory treatment. In Japan, conflicts will occur over what constitutes reasonable accommodation, and a social consensus on what is needed will arise from the resolution. A mediation system will be established in each local community by the Japanese anti-discrimination law. IHEs should also have a function within the institutions to arbitrate in such conflicts on campus.

As this article is being written, in Spring 2015, the Japanese Cabinet Office, along with other Japanese ministries and agencies, have been preparing to enforce AEDD in April 2016. More concretely, they have been defining policies and guidelines in order to

construct an inclusive society and to secure the human rights of people with disabilities. Using these policies and guidelines, each IHE will construct an on-campus mediation system. These actions do not arise out of disability student services but from the Japanese Equal Employment Opportunity Law (1989), which legally obliges business operators, including IHEs, to mediate complaints regarding harassment. As a result of this, Japanese IHEs already have many practices in place concerning the development of a mediating system, committees, and counseling services for sexual/academic harassment. These structures will be helpful in developing a mediation system for securing the rights of SWDs.

### **Accessibility of Textbooks and Other Printed Materials**

Many students have specific difficulties (visual impairment, mobility impairments, and learning disabilities) with reading instructional materials. Classroom circumstances that allow only printed materials are considered a social barrier to students' inclusion into mainstream education. Currently, because of the Textbook Barrier-free Law of 2009, MEXT has started providing competitive research funds to non-profit organizations to facilitate preparation for and research on alternative formats (e.g., DAISY, EPUB, Microsoft DOCX, MP3) for government-authorized textbooks in elementary and secondary education. Students with print disabilities also need an accessible format for supplementary teaching materials, workbooks, and exam papers. However, the Japanese elementary/secondary mainstream educational system has not widely recognized the need for accessibility and alternative formats. IHEs that already have DSSs might have recognized the importance of such needs, as more diverse materials do exist in higher education. Nonetheless, a support system for other means of accessing printed materials in higher education is also needed urgently. At the same time, expansion and development of instructional methods that enhance students' learning or acquisition of information by ICT (i.e., text-to-speech software, tablet computers or PCs) will be needed at all educational stages.

### **Transition Support**

Unlike students in special schools, SWDs in mainstream education tend to be isolated from disability cultures and communities. As the Japanese educational system becomes inclusive, it is predicted that the number of SWDs who have limited opportunities relevant to their disabilities will increase. These opportunities include interaction with their elders with disabilities,

who could serve as role models in terms of knowledge of the resources available for people with disabilities, development in thinking about their disabilities, the needs specific to their lifestyle, social participation, and self-advocacy. These limited opportunities might be barriers to building the attitudes necessary for attending an institution of higher education and preparing for a career. Since 2007, DO-IT Japan<sup>3</sup> (Diversity, Opportunities, Internetworking and Technology: <http://doit-japan.org/>) has been supporting SWDs in making the transition from elementary to higher education and then to a career, and we expect that more such transition support will become available for SWDs.

### **An Association for Professionals in the DSS Field in Japan**

Because a shift has occurred from personal support services to reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities in Japanese IHEs, there is a growing need to share information and good practices among the service providers who were assigned to the pioneering work in their institutions. The issues regarding students with disabilities have been discussed in many different academic and professional organizations. Disability issues in higher education have been covered during meetings of academic associations for special education and psychology and during conferences for campus health service providers. However, faculty and staff members involved with support services for SWDs have not had opportunities for getting together to discuss issues and research findings for better practice. A number of people realized that the development of a new nationwide organization would help to improve the quality of support services for SWDs.

Thus, a new organization, the Japanese Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD JAPAN, <http://ahead-japan.org/>) was founded in 2014 and has held its first meeting. The presidents of AHEAD (Association on Higher Education and Disabilities) in the United States were invited to the meeting. Inputs from an organization that shares the same goal helped design the Japanese counterpart. The goals of the organization include facilitating collaboration and developing networks among higher education institutions and providing workshops and facilitating research activities to improve support services for SWDs. The organization started with 40 institutions that agreed upon the goals of the organization and began inviting both institutional and individual members.

The new organization is also expected to share information and experiences internationally by building a network with similar organizations in different parts of the world, such as the AHEAD in the United States

and the AHEAD (Association for Higher Education Access and Disability) in Ireland. IHEs and students who study there are encouraged more and more these days to be active globally. The global networking of the organizations whose focus is on students with disabilities in higher education can play an important role in facilitating SWDs' participation in this movement.

Table 1

*The Resource Centers and Cooperative Institutions of the JASSO Disability Student Support Network*

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Resource Centers

Sapporo Gakuin University  
 Miyagi University of Education  
 University of Tsukuba  
 University of Toyama  
 Nihon Fukushi University  
 Doshisha University  
 Kwansei Gakuin University  
 Hiroshima University  
 Fukuoka University of Education

Cooperative Institutions

Tsukuba University of Technology  
 National Institute of Special Needs Education  
 National Rehabilitation Center for Persons with Disabilities

Table 2

*Percent of Four-year Higher Education Institutions Providing Support for Students with Developmental Disabilities by Support Type*

Support Type	%
Supports linked with coursework	
Provide printed instructions	17.8
Accommodation in practicum or laboratory work	16.8
Provide resting space	14.8
Seating arrangement in class	11.6
Permission for recording the lecture	11.1
Additional exam time or individual testing room	10.9
Tutors or teaching assistants to assist with ongoing course work	9.6
Alternative exam formats	6.7
Changing classrooms	4.7
Permission for using laptop during the lecture	4.0
Supports not directly linked with coursework	
Counseling (psychological)	55.8
Collaboration with parents	55.1
Teaching learning strategies and study skills	54.6
Teaching social skills	43.5
Career guidance	38.3
Teaching living skills	20.0
Collaboration with regional center for developmental disabilities	11.6
Collaboration with high school teachers	8.9
Collaboration with special schools (primary and secondary)	0.7

*Note.* Percentages are based on data from institutions that enrolled any students with developmental disabilities.



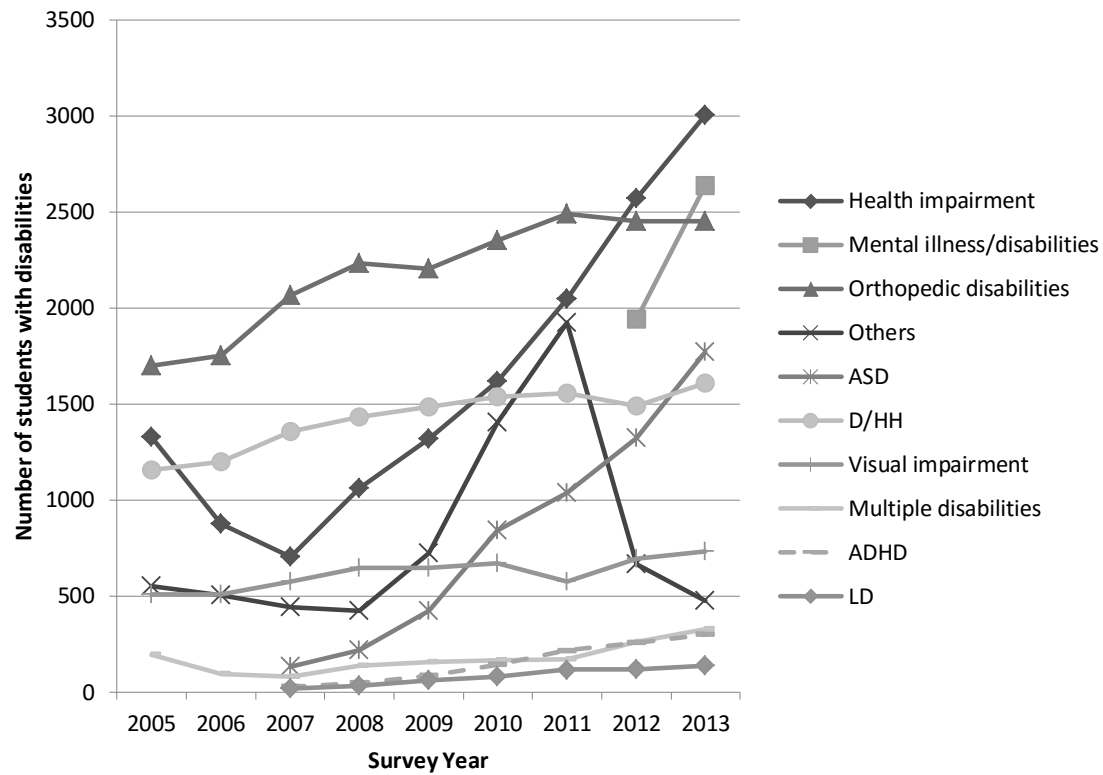


Figure 1. Change in numbers of students with each disability

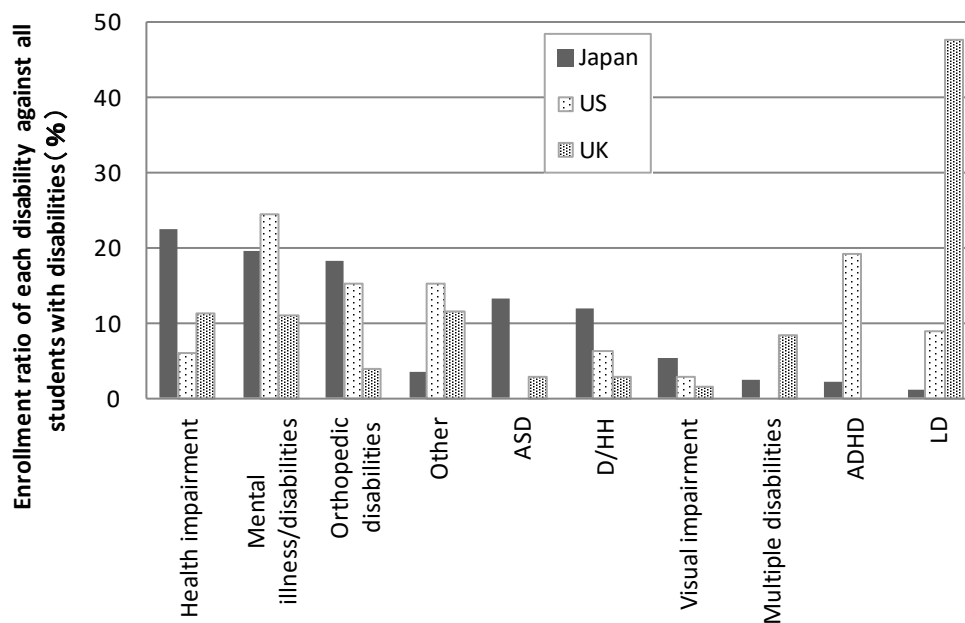


Figure 2. Enrolment ratio of each disability against all students with disabilities in Japan, the United States, and the United Kingdom.

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## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Although reasons for the different percentages of students with LD, ADHD, and ASD in Japan as compared to the United States and the United Kingdom have not been examined directly, some studies discuss the issues related with this topic. The impact of existing writing systems on dyslexia was discussed through the case study of a Japanese-English bilingual boy (Wydell & Butterworth, 1999). In addition, differences in the self-reported symptoms of ADHD among students in U.S. and Japanese IHEs were presented in Davis et al. (2012).

<sup>2</sup> Even though PEPNet-Japan and PEPNet in the United States are not linked organizationally, PEPNet-Japan has received a large amount of input since it was established from the U.S. PEPNet. Particularly crucial has been the support from PEPNet-Northeast and its regional center (Rochester Institute of Technology).

<sup>3</sup> The DO-IT Japan program has been developed based on the DO-IT (Disabilities, Opportunities, Internet-working and Technology) program at the University of Washington (Seattle, Washington, USA <http://uw.edu/doit/>). It has been customized and extended to fit Japanese society, culture, and systems. DO-IT Japan and DO-IT US have a close relationship with each other.

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